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SUBJECT: UAE MINISTER OF CABINET AFFAIRS ON CAMEL JOCKEYS,
POLITICAL REFORM

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Saeed Al Ghaith told Ambassador April 5 that he expects federal cabinet approval of a new law banning underage camel jockeys at its next meeting on Monday, April 11. Although formal approval is pending, the UAEG has implemented it effective March 31, meaning those who employ camel jockeys now have two months to repatriate the children. Source country embassies are already processing some of the children. On the possibility of representative government, Al Ghaith indicated that the UAE was receptive to political change because the UAE has an "adaptable" society. He also reiterated UAEG support for the Iraqi people, and said he believes that the UAE has been spared from violent terrorist attacks because its leadership has addressed its people's needs, while also addressing security vulnerabilities. End Summary.

Camel Jockey Law

2. (C) The Ambassador and Pol Chief met with Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Saeed Al Ghaith on April 5. Ambassador took the opportunity to share an April 3 New York Times article about the underage camel jockey problem in the UAE, and to urge UAEG to end the use of trafficked underage camel jockeys. She said it had become a "painful issue" that has brought "negative attention" to the bilateral relationship. Al Ghaith nodded in agreement. "The law will come. It's not going to be a problem," he replied as he glanced at the article. Ambassador emphasized the importance of acting swiftly. She also encouraged the UAEG to work with the International Organization for Migration on repatriation issues. Al Ghaith assured Ambassador that the law was in its "final stages" and the Cabinet would approve it on April 11.

3. (SBU) According to a Ministry of Interior source, the UAEG has clearly communicated its intent to enforce the law on March 31 per the public announcements by Deputy Prime Minister and de facto Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed. Regardless of the actual approval date by the Cabinet, the two-month grace period for those who employ underage camel jockeys to repatriate the children began on March 31. Meanwhile, we have reports from source country embassies (Pakistan and Bangladesh in particular) that former camel jockeys are being processed for repatriation -- developments to be covered septel.

Political Reform

4. (C) Al Ghaith was sanguine about the possibilities of opening up the UAE's political space. He said that Emiratis have always been an "adaptable" people who were not hostile to the idea of political representation. He credited the ruler of Sharjah emirate, Sheikh Sultan Al Qassimi, for "opening ways for people to communicate" through the creation of municipal councils. However, he said that each of the emirates must approach political reform in a measured, orderly fashion, with ample civic education. Ambassador described some of our MEPI and International Visitor programs and encouraged participation as a way to expose UAE nationals to the role of civil society, models of good governance, and the role of an independent media.

Regional Politics: Iraq, Qatar

5. (C) Al Ghaith and Ambassador reviewed the situation in Iraq, and exchanged views on Gulf security in the aftermath of the attack in Qatar in March. Al Ghaith (a 1965 University of Baghdad graduate) acknowledged that there were "desperate people" in Iraq who were prepared to sacrifice their lives in suicide operations. He blamed extremists for desensitizing their followers of any sense of danger and responsibility. He also contrasted the suffering and oppression under Saddam with the freedom Iraqis now enjoy. Ambassador used the opportunity to thank the UAEG for its behind-the-scenes support for the Iraqi people and transitional government. Commenting on Qatar's recent experience with terrorism, Al Ghaith said that wealthy countries cannot ignore their security vulnerabilities, and

they must do a better job of addressing the economic needs of their people. The UAE has been tolerant of others people and made strides with educational reforms, but it cannot afford to let its guard down, he said.

Biographic note

16. (U) Saeed Khalfan Al Ghaith has served as Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs since 1985. Born in 1946 in Dubai, he graduated from the University of Baghdad in 1965, and studied English in London. He worked previously in the political department of the Foreign Ministry. In addition to his ministry portfolio, Al Ghaith also heads the federal Civil Service Council, and the Institute of Administrative Development.

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